Effectiveness of Video Training for Law Enforcement

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Introduction

The South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy (SCCJA) is where all law enforcement officers in the state of South Carolina are trained. We are responsible for training Basic Law Enforcement Officers, Basic Detention Officers, and Basic Telecommunication Officers (911 dispatchers). Many other advanced training classes and certifications are offered to law enforcement throughout the state like speed measuring devices and drug recognition as well as all instructor level courses in Driving, Firearms, and Defensive Tactics.

The Academy began operations in 1972 and has continued to grow our campus and training course offerings. Over the years, a driving course, firearms range, many classrooms, and several dormitories have been built on campus the facilitate a learning environment. Currently, training for the basic law enforcement program is 12 weeks long. Students live on campus during that 12-week training program.

Over time, the Academy has struggled to keep up with the need for officers. Turnover in law enforcement has increased significantly in the last several years, which causes more pressure on law enforcement departments throughout the state to hire and train new officers. The Academy handled four basic law classes of 72 students each on campus at a time. Every three weeks, a new class would start. This means about 1,200 students would graduate yearly from the Academy if we had a 100% success rate. We averaged a 73% success rate at this time, which means that the maximum number of students we could train yearly was about 875 students.

A backlog of students was building up as we continued training students. The backlog reached the point where there was nearly a six-month waiting list before a student could enter the Academy. We cannot train students until they are hired by a law enforcement agency in the state. During this six-month waiting period, agencies would have personnel that were under trained on their payrolls while waiting for a training slot to come available. We received quite a bit of pressure from the field to try and find a solution to the backlog problem.

The 4x8 program was devised to help the backlog decrease while helping us train more students. It would be a hybrid learning environment that would consist of four weeks of learning at the student's pace online and then another eight weeks on campus to learn more hands-on skills like defensive tactics, driving and shooting.

History of Video Training at the Academy

In 1988, it was clear that law enforcement certifications should require some training in order to maintain. A system was put into place to require the officers to complete a certain number of hours of training every three years in order to maintain their certifications. In doing so, a need was formed to develop training to be completed by these officers, so the Academy set out in setting up a way to broadcast training to officers. A microwave tower and on-site studio were acquired. In 1991, the Academy broadcast the first training course to the field over a satellite connection. Since then, a partnership was developed with ETV to broadcast training content for officers to watch and learn. Training would be distributed from the Academy to ETV, which would relay it

to everyone. Law enforcement agencies around the state would record the content when it was shown so that their officers could watch it.

In 2009, the decision was made to migrate from satellite broadcasts to using the internet to transmit training with and open-source learning management software called Moodle. Because we had our own studio, we can record our own training content that was pushed out to the field.

In 2013, the ACADIS (Academy Information System) was acquired and tested internally. After a year of testing, it was placed into production to be used as a records management software as well as an online learning management solution. This new software gave us more control of online learning and allowed us to verify the training was being watched. Because it was integrated into our records management software, the training records were automatically stored into an officer's record. Nearly 28,000 courses were viewed through the Acadis LMS in its first year. In the second year, the number of courses viewed nearly tripled to 76,000.

In 2018, the Academy acquired a new testing module for Acadis, which allowed us to give online tests and track grades of students. Before this, paper tests and scantrons were used for tests.

June 2019: The 4x8 program was first rolled out to agencies to allow their students to begin training online.

In 2020, 112,000 video courses were watched as we moved much of our training online due to the dire need for law enforcement throughout the state and the COVID-19 pandemic that prevented us from doing face to face training.

4x8 Program

In March 2019, we began implementing a new plan to eliminate the backlog of students and allow us to successfully train more students. Several courses we recorded that would then be broadcast to students to watch. The training would be split into four weeks or blocks. After each block, a student could then log into the Acadis website and take a test associated with that block of content. The test was designed to rate the student's mastery of that content. If they failed, they would watch the block content again. After the four block tests are completed, the student schedules a time to come take a cumulative test that encompasses information from all four block tests. After passing the cumulative test, the student then runs to Physical Abilities Test (PAT). Once they complete the PAT, they are given a date and time they will start the eight-week program at the Academy.

During the student's eight weeks on campus, things were mostly the same. The big change was since the training was eight weeks instead of twelve weeks, we moved from a new class on campus every three weeks to a new class every two weeks. The extra week means that the Academy could potentially graduate 1,900 students per year if we had a 100% success rate.

This new program introduced many efficiencies into our system and allowed the student to be ready to go when they got onto campus. Before this program, agencies hired students, which waited for a slot to attend the Academy. Once that slot opened, they would report on Sunday night and run the PAT. Because the students ran the PAT

the day before their training began, many times students would fail the PAT and be sent home immediately, which opens a valuable slot that would go unfilled. Also, the students were unvetted academically. Because the students had not taken any tests before attending, many would fail out after the first week of legal classes. In the 4x8, the students have taken the block tests so it allows their agencies to evaluate if they thought the student would make it through the training program.

With the help of these efficiencies, the Academy was able to boost the success rate to 94%. After only seven classes, our backlog was eliminated. When a student would take the cumulative test that encompasses the four-week online training and completed the physical abilities test, they were given a start time no longer than ten days.

Findings

After utilizing this program for about eight months, we found that the average test score increased by one percent, while our departed students decreased by nearly ten percent. We believe this is due to our students being vetted and tested before they arrive on campus for training. Just the simple change of moving the physical abilities to be performed before the student starts training, has relieved stress from our registrations department. They would try to find a student to fill the spot of a departed student, but that can be tough to do when training starts the next day and lasts twelve weeks. Now, that the PAT is run earlier, our departments know who is going to be in what class days and weeks ahead of time.

Evaluation Method

In order to ensure the program is still beneficial to our customers, we must evaluate our performance often. I believe the best way to check our effectiveness is by asking the agencies we support via a yearly survey. A yearly survey sent to law enforcement agencies in the state should help keep our finger on the pulse of the needs of our customers.

These surveys should be sent to Sheriffs, Police Chiefs, and training officers, which help keep up with the training of the agency's officers. The questions do not need to be very complicated to ask about the effectiveness of the 4x8 program and the new officers that are coming out of the program. As long as these parties are pleased with the training, we should keep the program intact.

Conclusion

This 4x8 program has been great for us and our customers. The Academy can train students faster, while receiving a better candidate from the agencies we support with little to no additional cost on our agency or the field. The law enforcement agencies we support have given us extremely positive feedback about this program change, but we must continue listen to our customers as the training needs and environment change in the future.

Because the field has been extremely pleased with this program so far, we have called it a success and will continue to train class 1 law enforcement students in this manner for the foreseeable future until the needs of the field change in a way that requires us to adapt.

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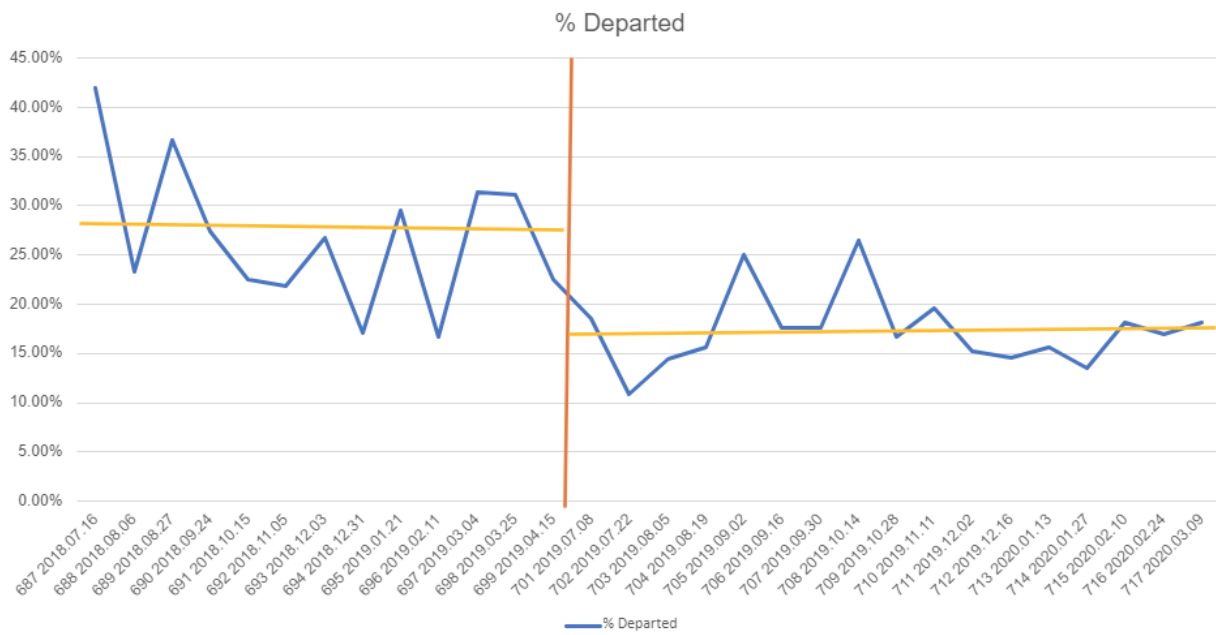
Figure1: Percentage of students departed over time.

% Departed

Figure 2: Average test scores by class.

Class Session	Average
687	90.01%
688	91.08%
689	90.39%
690	88.90%
691	89.54%
692	89.23%
693	89.03%
694	90.70%
695	87.36%
696	90.82%
697	89.95%
698	90.73%
699	90.11%
701	91.16%
702	90.05%
703	90.32%
704	90.46%
705	90.63%
706	89.88%
707	91.38%
708	90.78%
709	91.30%
710	89.85%
711	90.96%
712	90.06%
713	90.96%
714	91.40%
715	90.96%
716	91.87%
717	90.02%